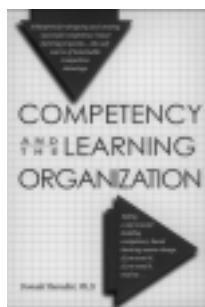


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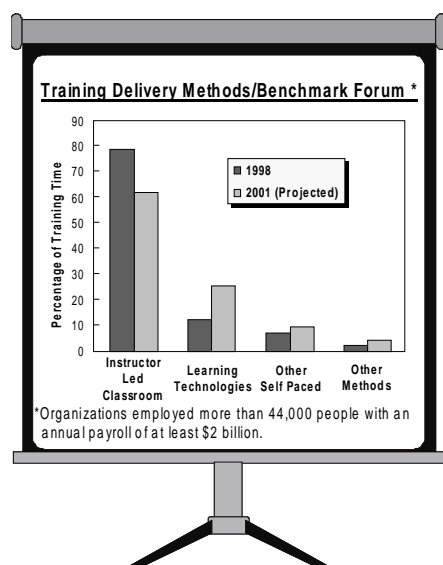


Donald Shandler, director of Continuing Education at the Graduate School, has authored "Competency and the Learning Organization." His book focuses on acquisition of competency for individuals, teams and organizations. Crisp Publications published the book in February.

► **Competency - Based Learning, p. 2**

SNAPSHOTS

Use of learning technologies will jump.



Source: 2000 ASTD State of the Industry Report
American Society for Training and Development

COVER STORY

Court Managers Sit Down to Study

Self-study requires commitment—a quality first-line supervisors in the federal judiciary value, judging by the success of the National Independent Study Center's tailored supervisory course. A year after the first students signed up, 800 supervisors in two distinct judicial organizations, the U.S. Court system and the U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services, have enrolled in *Foundations of Management*. The Federal Judicial Center, which administers employee training in the federal court system, coordinated the project.

Taking a cost-effective approach, a team from each organization worked with NISC staff to modify an existing course. The two teams edited out wording and references not applicable to the federal judiciary, and presented concepts and issues in judiciary settings by writing scenarios and describing problems drawn from the work units in each organization.

"Customizing a generic course to fit into a familiar organizational setting substantially increases

the impact of the training experience," says Mike Allen, NISC director. "While the concepts and issues being presented may not change, the student is not distracted by unknown terminology or fictional organizations."

Students learn about customer



service, ethics, communication, leadership, motivation, performance management and diversity. And because of the self-study format, newly appointed court managers can:

- Finish the course at their own pace in a six-month time frame.
- Minimize work schedule interruptions.
- Avoid travel time and costs.

"The outstanding content, the national view with local adaptation, and the fact that it is a user friendly format makes the training successful," says David Leathery, chief of probation and pretrial programs.

For more information about independent study, call NISC at (303) 236-8500.

Competency-Based Learning: Raising the Bar on Performance

By Maureen L. Rogers

Nancy Randa, director of the National Capital Training Center, and Donald Shandler, director of Continuing Education, offered a primer on competency-based learning and its growing influence as a key driver of superior performance in a wide-ranging interview with News and Information editor Laura Chatfield.

In our fiercely competitive market-driven global economy, few organizations, irrespective of profession or industry, can afford to employ average performers. Instead, they must attract not only those “who are extremely flexible and can just turn on a dime,” says Nancy Randa, but also those who possess a “broad and flexible range of competence,” adds Don Shandler. Simply possessing adequate skills specific to a given job is no



Donald Shandler

longer sufficient for achieving the top performance demanded in today’s dynamic workplace.

So a number of agencies and businesses are abandoning traditional skill-driven training and turning to a broader, more inclusive competency-based development.

This learning and performance model is designed to provide participants with an opportunity to acquire complex competencies that are “transferable” immediately (or subsequently to a different occupation), Shandler points out that although competency-driven training has been around for decades in more technical disciplines (medicine, engineering), it has been newly embraced by a wider segment of the work force with an emphasis on “extraordinary performance.” Further, Shandler describes how many organizations are actually moving away from “job descriptions and traditional performance review systems and looking at a competency-based learning and performance models that integrate the recruiting, selecting, developing and measuring of

workplace performance.”

And what is competency learning aiming for? From an organizational standpoint, it may be, as Randa suggests, that “the competency-based approach, which uses techniques such as real-life simulations of actual work environments, tries to integrate the skills people acquire with an opportunity to transform them into the workplace.”



Nancy Randa

To achieve this, two features of competency learning are always in play. First, feedback, which lets people know, says Randa, where they are starting from in acquiring a competency and how they are doing throughout the learning process. And, second, repetition, which involves repeating a habit many times since “it often takes much longer to change or develop a competency than it does to develop a simple skill or acquire some knowledge.” But before organizations move to competency learning and performance systems, they must decide what kind of model to use. Off the shelf? Invent your own? Partner with someone? This is a basic cost-benefit decision says Randa, who cautions that generic models are most economical but should be validated by the organization adapting it.

From all appearances, competency-based learning and performance is becoming the coin of the management realm and is, according to Shandler, “one of the more talked-about but less-understood tools we have available.” Nevertheless, our experts applaud the notion of a competency development tool that the Graduate School is leveraging curriculumwide, as a means for helping internal customers and external clients “turn the organization into a knowledge management enterprise.” It also implies, says Shandler, the need to “increase our competence on competencies. Managers, teachers, everyone involved has to better understand it.”

TRAINING

Conference Management Reaches 12-Year Milestone

Some memories stand out. A chef tosses knives in the air and catches them in a comic cooking demo at a food safety education conference. A boisterous group of 60 kids troop through the National Zoo's wetlands during a youth award program. And a last-minute struggle with a presidential campaign staff over the use of a large meeting room nabs a client more than \$15,000 in savings in a compromise with the hotel.

For Isabelle Howes, these were just a few examples of the demands – and pleasures – of her Conference Management job at the Graduate School. As one of two managers in a four-member team that contracts with agencies to organize conferences nationwide, Howes helps set up small meetings and large conferences. Their largest conference hosted 2,500 attendees; smaller meetings have averaged 10 to 30 people. Last year, the group organized 11 conferences. At least 13 are already scheduled for 2000, with the March conference for the Joint Financial Management Improvement Program expecting 1,100 participants.



“Clients are typically government agencies, training officers and education managers,” says Howes. “The best part of my job is the opportunity to meet so many people from different agencies and to get a feel for how government operates.”

Preferred lead time is one year, but a six-month time frame is not unusual. One conference was organized in three weeks for 150 people in the Southwest—which is calling it close.

What are the nuts and bolts of conference management? The team can:

- ▶ Assist in selecting a site.
- ▶ Negotiate contracts with hotels and vendors.
- ▶ Coordinate printed materials, handle registrations and maintain attendee rosters.
- ▶ Order signage and create badges.
- ▶ Handle on-site conference logistics.
- ▶ Review and pay all bills.

Howes says clients cite several reasons for choosing the Graduate School's conference management services. They like the experience, quality of service, flexibility with special requests and ease of using an interagency agreement. They also appreciate how the team makes clients look good, meets budget requirements and sets reasonable prices. *For more information about Conference Management, call (202) 314-3471/3462.*

Quality Standards at Work

In December, for the first time, the Graduate School director and program directors adopted quality and timeliness standards for materials used in all Graduate School courses.

“The quality standards were drawn up as part of a more comprehensive effort to improve the quality of instructional services that the school provides to customers,” says Frank Bauer, the director of the Northeast Training Center, who served as a key organizer of the work.

As chair of the Instructional Design Task Force, Bauer took a set of quality standards adopted earlier by regional

offices, and incorporated recommendations for improvement from program directors and the school's Instructional Design Advisory Committee, which is made up of 15 outside experts from the private sector, academia and government. He worked with Nancy Randa, director of the National Capital Training Center, on the project.

Exceptions are expected. “Although the standards apply to all courses the Graduate School offers, program directors will need to exercise some judgment as to how to apply them,” says Bauer.

For more information, call Frank Bauer at (215) 861-4703.

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WHAT'S NEW

A New Title: Judy Tabachow, a program manager with the Center for Applied Technology since 1995, is now a training manager with AmeriSchool. For her work with the Graduate School, she has received awards for staff and faculty excellence and a Jefferson Cup.

Metro Makes It: The participation of Metro Graduate School employees in the Combined Federal Campaign hit 58 percent – 10 percent more than last year.

Enhancing Team Performance: Steve Sugar, an Evening Programs instructor, has authored “Games That Teach Teams.” Sugar and co-author George Takacs have written more than 20 open-formatted games for developing and improving teamwork. Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer published the book and Sugar’s “Games That Teach.”

Evening Programs Sits In: A new classroom visitation program has been launched by Evening Programs. The entire academic program team will make visits to classes on a rolling basis in an effort to improve the quality of instruction. This quarter 50 classes will be visited; 200 are planned for the year.

